UPS: A User's Guide for Socialist Worker Sales
By Joe Allen

Many comrades are aware by now that UPS-Teamsters voted by a 90% yesvote to authorize a strike against UPS if contract negotiations stalled or if the company's "last, best, and final offer" wasn't acceptable to the national negotiating committee. Myself and others have written extensively about UPS over the years and the current contract battle. My writings on UPS are available, hereand here, while the Socialist Worker's archive on UPS is available, here.

Pick a convenient hub and shift

The latest issue of the ISO Notes encouraged branches to sell Socialist Worker at the most geographically convenient UPS hubs. The next issue of Socialist Worker may carry a major article on the strike vote and the contract issues. If not, the article posted todayon the SocialistWorker.org ("We need to make UPS deliver") could be made into a flier and handed out, and is a good way to start a conversation.

Luckily for us, most of the older cities in the U.S. have UPS hubs, even multiple hubs, located near the city centers or nearby suburbs. The first UPS hub I worked in, for example, is located in Watertown, Massachusetts, a short bus ride from Central Square in Cambridge, but UPS built a medium-sized facility a few years on the new south Boston waterfront next to FedEx and DHL.

New York City has a plethora of UPS hubs with, at least, one in every borough and several in Manhattan. The venerable Jefferson St. hub in Chicago, where many of us previously worked, is conveniently located south of the Loop. In San Francisco, where the latest mass shootingtook place at UPS last year, is located on Potrero Hill, while the Oakland hub is also conveniently located.

Unfortunately, many of the largest UPS hubs are in closed industrial parks like the mammoth CACH—the biggest ground

package facility in the world employing 6,000 to 8,000 workers—that straddles the two villages of Willow Springs/Hodgkins, Il, southwest of Chicago. Others are located deep inside airport campuses making them inaccessible to non-employees primarily because of TSA restrictions.

Many of these hubs are well-known to veteran ISO members who did strike support in 1997 or worked or sold Socialist Worker at them later. But, I would encourage comrades to double check on start and finish times for various shifts. Many of the older hubs are still vital to UPS's downtown deliveries, especially Next Day Air deliveries, and Amazon home deliveries in the huge, gleaming residential towers that have sprouted up around the city centers over the last two decades. But, they have also experienced important changes for part time shifts. Jeff St., for example, no longer has any day shifts for part timers.

The best way to find out is to ask the UPS driver who delivers to your workplace or your neighborhood what the shifts are. We still have a small number of members who work at UPS and be sure to talk to them about shifts, issues, and whether they are in a position to sell Socialist Worker at the employee entrances.

The Political Ecology of UPS

I want to make a few comments about what you are likely to encounter selling Socialist Worker at UPS. Keep in mind that we haven't sold the paper at UPS for nearly a dozen years or more on any regular basis, so we are likely to be very rusty. The attached readings in the ISO Notes will help you understand the current contract issues.

UPS is one of the fabulously profitable and exploitative industrial corporations to work for today. The workplace is run by a cult-like management that aggressively pushes its workers beyond the human limit for productivity all the time. UPS has a long history of winning concessions from the Teamsters, except during the Carey reform years 1991-1997, but it also one of major bastions for the reform movement in the Teamsters that nearly toppled General

President James P. Hoffa from office two years ago. Teamsters United, the reform slate, won seventy percent of the UPS vote.

It is also one of the most racially integrated workplaces in the United States especially in the big metropolitan areas. The package car and feeder (over-the-road) drivers are generally one-third black, white, and Latino. Most part timers are however overwhelmingly black and Latino. It is still a largely male dominated workplace though as each year passes, more women make up a larger percentage of the workforce including package and feeder drivers.

Most part timers you'll meet will not be in the Teamsters. Many will be in their probationary period of thirty to forty days before they "make" the union, while others will have been recently hired. Part timers have a ninety percent annual turnover rate, the industry standard. There's a fast moving revolving door constantly rotating part timers in and out of the company. The low wages and shitty working conditions are not a great incentive to stay. Some part timers will be interested but for many this is likely to be their first contract and know very little.

Higher wages generally are the biggest issues for long term and short term part timers. Starting wages were kept at $8.00 to $9.00 for three decades, they have crept up in the last two contracts. They are likely to increase in this one because of rising state and local minimum wages, and the competition from Amazon, who pay more.

For long term part timers the lack of access to full time, non-driving jobs are major issues along with harassment and safety. Many of them work other part time jobs or even a fulltime jobs and work at UPS primarily because of the health benefits that despite concessions is still one of best health care packages in the country. None of them want any concessions on health care especially on family and dental coverage.

For full time package car drivers, wages for the top scale package cars are not really an issue. They make $36.00 an hour. The major issues for them are the excessive overtime and harassment that leads to major physical, mental health, and family problems. The two mass killings at UPS in the last four years were carried out by

full time package car drivers not part timers. The other major issue is concern for the stability of the various Teamster pension funds but depending on the region your selling in, the health of the pension funds will vary.

It is also important to remember that many part timers live and work in the communities victimized by police racism and Trump'santi-immigrant policies. Socialist Worker's broader coverage of these issues will appeal to them and help deepen political discussions. One of the best paper sales we ever had at Jeff St. was when we had an article on the late Black Panther leader Geronimo Prattaround the time he got out of prison. We sold forty Socialist Workers.

At the same time, you'll also find a small number of black workers who spout anti-immigrant sentiments, and a surprising number of older, high paid package car and feeder drivers (black, white, and Latino) who support Trump, though I don't think they'll be as vocal as they were a year ago. Bernie, however, was the favored candidate for many Teamster activists in 2016 and is still popular. "So, you're a socialist like Bernie?" some will ask.

To sum up: UPS maybe a very racially intergraded and potentially militant workforce but it is also very stratified and divided with a myriad of job classifications, wage rates, and a very higher turnover rate. UPS stokes these divisions which the Teamster leadership under Hoffa sadly does little to counter. Teamsters United (TU) did a very good job bring at building a coalition at UPS that won 70% of the vote and nearly toppled Hoffa from office in the 2016 Teamster election.

Probabilities and possibilities

Will there be a strike? What should we argue? The overwhelmingly vote to authorize a strike produced a short lived media panic about a national strike at UPS. A good development. Yet, Hoffa and his chief negotiator Denis Taylor have done everything they can to appease UPS. Despite this some Wall St. analysts, like Wolfe Research, argue that UPS should risk a strike if the Teamsters hesitate about important concessions:

> Scott H. Group, Wolfe's lead transport analyst, said in a note that “this is a really important labor contract for UPS to get right if it wants to start leveraging strong e-commerce growth.” Group said that UPS “needs significantly more labor flexibility” in the upcoming contract, and that taking a strike should be considered if it leads to “long-term labor flexibility and thus better operating leverage for shareholders.”

This almost sounds like a call for a lockout to me. I think our position should be, “Vote No and Be Ready to Strike.”

Teamsters United (TU) supported by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), the long standing rank and file reform organization, is holding UPS contract Unity rallies at both UPS hubs and UPS freight barn next week from June 18-21. We should go to them if we can. Things are likely to be different in Chicago because Teamsters Local 705 and 710 have separate contracts and haven’t started to negotiate nor have they taken strike votes.

It is expected that Taylor and Hoffa will spring a shitty contract on the membership in the next few weeks and hope it passes but I don’t think will be so easy for them. A vote no campaign will be launched by TU and TDU. A strike will possibly take place only after this process in completed and not before, unless UPS decides to provoke a strike. Some of this just needs to play out.

Resources:
All UPS contracts and supplements are available, here.
Sign up for contract campaign alerts from Teamsters United, here.
For overall developments in the Teamsters sign up at TDU, here.